

# **MEMO**

**TO: ETOWAH COUNTY JURORS SUMMONED TO JURY SERVICE**

**FROM: CIRCUIT JUDGES AND CIRCUIT CLERK  
16<sup>TH</sup> JUDICIAL CIRCUIT**

**DATE: AUGUST 31, 2020**

**RE: JURY TRIALS BALANCE OF 2020 FALL CALENDAR**

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## **I. INTROUCTION TO JURY SERVICE**

It's our honor to serve as your Circuit Judges and Circuit Clerk here in Etowah County. On behalf of the judges, circuit clerk staff and our court staffs, we'd like to thank you for your willingness to serve as a juror. Jury service is one of the most important duties of citizenship that we have in our country. You'll be taking part in a tradition that dates back hundreds of years and stands as the cornerstone of our justice system. I believe that you, like so many others before you, will find jury service to be an educational and a satisfying experience. We also want to make your jury service a safe one. We hope the following information will answer some of your questions about what you can expect from your jury service during the COVID-19 pandemic and to address some of the concerns you may have.

When arriving for jury service, please park where parking is available at the William H. Rhea III Judicial Building ("Judicial Building") and the Etowah County Courthouse. Jurors will enter the Judicial Building through the Forrest Avenue front entrance or the rear parking lot entrance in the back of the Judicial Building.

For your safety and the safety of others, we request that you wear a mask as you enter the Judicial Building and anytime that you cannot maintain a social distance of six feet from others. Since all prospective jurors will be seated at least six feet apart from other potential jurors, you won't be required to wear your mask once you have been checked in and seated. Of course, you can always keep your mask on if that makes you more comfortable. In addition to masks, face shields will be provided to those who prefer them.

## **II. PROCEDURES FOR JURORS NOT QUALIFIED ON-LINE**

If you have **not** qualified on-line, on the Monday your jury service begins, you should arrive at the Judicial Building between 8:30 and 8:45 AM. As you enter the Judicial Building to begin your jury service, you will pass through a metal detector and a no contact thermal scanner or handheld touchless thermometer that will check each potential juror for a fever. Any person having a fever greater than 100 degrees Fahrenheit will not be allowed to enter the Judicial Building. Security will also be asking all required protocol safety questions as required by the CDC and Alabama Department of Public Health.

After your temperature scan shows you have no fever and you have passed all CDC / Alabama Department of Public Health safety protocols, you will either take the stairs or ride the elevators to the Jury Assembly Room located on the ground floor. There you will be checked in for jury duty and will be qualified thereafter by the Circuit Judge presiding over the jurors that week. Stairways are available for jurors with no physical limitations. The elevators will be reserved for individuals with physical and/or other health limitations. If you decide to use the elevators, please remember that only two individuals may ride an elevator at one time who are not members of the same household so that social distancing can be preserved.

As you enter the jury assembly room, you will notice a contactless hand sanitizing station set up so each person who enters can easily practice good hand sanitizing, which the CDC has indicated is one of the best ways to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Upon your arrival, if a line has formed at jury duty check-in, we ask each person to maintain a distance of at least six feet from others. Social distancing markers will be placed on the floor to indicate where each person should stand.

The Circuit Clerk and Deputy Circuit Clerk will be waiting to greet you as you enter the Jury Assembly Room to begin your in-person jury qualification process. Before jurors arrive for orientation, all seats in the Jury Assembly Room will have been sanitized with a disinfectant solution designed to kill the COVID-19 virus. In addition, all pens and other frequently touched surfaces will also be thoroughly cleaned with a disinfectant, and this cleaning will occur periodically throughout the day.

To ensure proper social distancing, chairs have been spaced six feet from each other. After being checked in, you will be directed to your seat and you may remove your mask at that time, if you wish. But please remember, anytime you need to get up from your seat during a recess and are unable to maintain six feet social distancing from others, you will need to put your face mask on to keep you and others safe.

If the Jury Assembly Room reaches maximum capacity while honoring six-foot social distancing requirements, the additional jurors will be placed in specified courtroom(s) to await qualification by a Circuit Judge. All courtrooms have been pre-marked to provide for six-foot social distancing. Court Attendants and Judicial Building staff will assist you when entering the courtroom.

Once all in-person jurors have been checked in to the Jury Assembly Room, or is necessary other Courtroom(s), a Circuit Judge(s) will begin jury orientation and qualification of jurors. After qualifying you will be instructed when to report back to the Judicial Building to begin in-court jury selection.

### **III. PROCEDURE FOR JURORS QUALIFYING ON-LINE**

All jurors will be issued a summons to appear for jury service that will also include instructions to qualify for jury service on-line. Many of you have already received these summonses for the October 5, 2020 jury trial week. The following on-line qualification website address has been provided with each summons: <https://etowah.juror.alacourt.gov>. Once you arrive at the website homepage, you will be required to enter your personal PIN# which will allow you to begin the secure qualification process.

The on-line qualification is self-explanatory; however, should you need additional assistance qualifying, please contact the phone number listed on the summons. We will be glad to assist you. The state court on-line qualification

process has been modeled after the federal court system. This service has been made available to help maintain social distancing within the Judicial Building during jury qualification and jury selection process.

After you have qualified on-line, one week prior to the Monday for which you are summoned to appear for jury service you will receive an e-mail and phone call from the judge's Court Attendant informing you when and where you are to report to the Judicial Building to begin your jury service.

Once you arrive at the Judicial Building you will be directed by security to the courtroom to which you are to report. After all jurors are seated additional qualifying will begin followed by jury selection.

#### **IV. IF SELECTED AS A JUROR**

If you are chosen as a juror in a case, you will be assigned a seat in a newly configured jury box. Those individuals who have not been chosen as jurors for the first case will be instructed by the Circuit Clerk's Office on how to proceed. Once selected as a juror your service will likely last no more than five-days.

Because it would be impossible to keep an appropriate social distance in a traditional jury box, we have created a special jury box in the courtroom gallery. The jurors will also be allowed to deliberate within the courtroom to ensure six-foot social distancing can be maintained.

At the conclusion of your jury service you will be issued a work excuse to provide to your employer.

#### **V. IN CONCLUSION**

As we restart jury trials, I want you to know that your wellbeing is our top priority. We would never ask you to put your health at risk by serving on a jury. Many of you have understandable fears about contracting COVID-19 due to age or underlying health conditions and the law allows you to be excused from jury service because of these health concerns. If you have worries about attending a public event such as a jury trial, please contact the telephone number listed on this website to speak with a designated court official that has been authorized to excuse you

altogether. Thanks again for your willingness to serve as a juror. Without you we have no jury system. We look forward to seeing you in court!